

Youth says foster care provided her a better future

Meet the parents

Andy and Rhonda Johansson have been foster parents since 1997; they love being foster parents. They are the proud parents of one birth son Tim, 22, and five wonderful girls: Amanda, 17; Trisha, 16; Ariana, 12; Kayla, 9; and Ieisha, 7. Amanda came to them in 1998 when she was 12 years old. Just like any other child new to foster care Amanda was confused and scared. Amanda had been forced in to the caregiver role in her birth family. It was like she was 12 going on 40.

Rhonda told Amanda that there are two most important rules in their home: One was that Rhonda and Andy were the adults and Amanda got to be the child. The second rule was that school was very important. It soon became apparent that Amanda loved to draw. She told the Johanssons it helped her feel better. They immediately went out and bought every kind of art supply they could find to keep her happy. The more she drew the better she got. Her talent was truly amazing. Now she is planning to continue her education and focus on art.

Amanda became a permanent addition to Johansson family in

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This biography was written for the United States Achievement Academy. Amanda has been nominated for the USAA National Arts award. She was nominated by her Art teacher Ms. Ruth Hanson.

Hi, my name is Amanda. I am a senior at Harvard High School. My family and I moved to Harvard in 2001. At first, I wasn't very enthusiastic about the move, but switching high schools turned out to be a great adventure. I joined cheerleading and made the Varsity squad, which helped me acclimate to my new surroundings. Cheerleading taught me discipline and trust, and gave me confidence in myself. I worked hard, made new friends and enjoyed it very much.

Although moving was not new to me, my family had a history of many changes. In 1998, due to a birth family member's drug addiction, I became a ward of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. I started my life as a foster child in a home in St. Charles, Illinois. At age 12, I understood the decisions being made, but felt my life had just been taken away.

My first experience in foster care was not very comforting. Soon I would be moved again. I remember thinking, "Here I go again. Would this be my new life, moving from home to home?" Little did I know my next move would be my final one. I went for what they called a pre-placement visit to meet the Johanssons. When I arrived at their home I felt an immediate feeling of relief and comfort. I liked this family. But did they like me? After our weekend visit I couldn't imagine going back, I remember telling Mrs. Johansson that I didn't want to leave. I was ecstatic when she told me I didn't have to go. I had tears of joy streaming down my face.

The transition seemed to be easy for both the Johanssons and me. They soon became mom and dad. The feeling of a dismal future began to disappear and I was beginning a new life. They had encouraged me socially and academically, telling me that I could be



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Meet the parents (cont.)

April 2000. They were all very excited. Andy and Rhonda expressed how happy they are that they decided to expand their family through foster care; they speak of having had many rewarding experiences. Rhonda shared, “the children we have and have had have given us so much enjoyment.”

Rhonda is also the Foster Support Specialist for the Woodstock field office. She truly hopes that she will be able to help other foster families to enrich their lives with foster care. Rhonda stated that she thinks that it is important to mention that foster families should not limit the age range on their licenses. They have had many wonderful teenagers in their home and they highly recommend giving those older kids a chance. They believe they have had the great opportunity to raise the next Picasso.

Northern News

Sponsor

Denise Gonzales
Regional Administrator

Regional Reporter

Diane Mitchell
DCFS Reporter/Editor
107 N. 3rd Street
Rockford, IL 61107
Phone: 815-967-3830
Fax: 815-967-3737



Call with foster parent association news and schedules; local training; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and news articles and support all foster families can use.

Northern Region finds many ways to say Thank You to foster parents

Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois provided an opportunity to give special thanks and praise to all those who care for foster children in the Northern region and for all those who work side-by-side with these special people!

Across the region, various forms of appreciation were shown. Each field office added its own special touch. In many celebrations, Denise Gonzales, DCFS Regional Administrator, offered the keynote address, along with many other excellent speakers and presentations.

In addition to the line-up of speakers, the field offices employed many creative approaches to show children and their foster families just how valued they are. A few examples of the special events include:

- o The Outstanding Youth Awards program, sponsored by an anonymous community donor, served to congratulate children for their accomplishments with a monetary award.
- o Several businesses and individuals received Community Awards for their outstanding support for the local foster care programs;
- o Families participated in fun door prize competitions at local events;
- o Many local offices bestowed individual gifts as tokens of appreciation and certificates of recognition were given to foster parents.

To those families who were unable to attend an appreciation event, the Northern Region administration would like to thank each of you. It is our belief that your time, love, kindness and patience are the most important and priceless gifts our many children in foster care receive.

Again, thank you to every foster parent and to all staff who help make the foster care experience better. And a big thank you to those resource, licensing and casework staff that worked on the planning and organizing of each field office's appreciation event.

Youth says foster care (cont.)

anything I wanted to be. They helped me through many obstacles and helped me to see that I had a future. This is why I'm here today, as a successful high school senior who plans to attend college and move on in life. It's another move, but a welcomed one. With the support of a wonderful family I truly believe I can be anything and I strive to work towards that goal. I have had many hurdles to overcome and I welcome the challenge of college and my future.

Youth Services Network is Northern Region link to System of Care

There may come a time when a family realizes that a child needs services to help iron out emotional or behavioral problems. Without these services, a placement could even be in jeopardy. In the Northern Region, Youth Services Network is the local entry to the state's System of Care (SOC). SOC is a community-based network of service providers that offer therapeutic stabilization, case management, and facilitation to foster children and their families. The System of Care network can help identify and provide these services to get children back on track in stable foster care placements.



SOC will serve children who are:

1. Residing in a home of a relative, traditional foster care, or DCFS managed foster home;
2. In need of successful transition to the home of a relative, traditional foster home, or living in residential or group home settings before transitioning to the homes of their parents;
3. In need of continuing or expanded post-hospitalization services or whose needs exceed the service timelines of the SASS provider.

Youth Services Network offers counseling, case management, facilitation, mentoring, and tutoring directly to SOC clients or arranges for needed services with other providers. The projected length of service is six months. Crisis response services are available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.

There have been some very successful SOC cases to date, where children and the caregivers can feel good about the interventions, and placements that have been saved from potential disruption. One of the most recent success stories involves the Jones brothers (names have been changed):

Tim is four years old and his brother, John, is five years old. They were acting out at home and at day care. Foster parent and teachers reported that it was difficult redirecting their temper tantrums. Neither of the boys calmed themselves down if they became angry. They fought and became physically aggressive with other children and adults. Their foster parents said that unless the boys' behaviors changed they were going to ask for their removal. Instead, they contacted the SOC for a referral.

YSN initiated services by doing a home visit with the staff that was going to be involved in the case, the caseworker, and the children. Everyone worked together to determine the families' needs and developed a schedule of services. For the Jones brothers, they put in place counseling, resource facilitation, play therapy, and case management services. Additionally a SASS referral was made based on information that one of the boys talked about not wanting to live any longer. SASS is continuing to offer services.

For two hours per week, The case manager goes to the school, to the home or takes them into the community, depending on what is needed. He also does other fun activities that build on what the counselor is working on with them. The counselor sees the boys and the foster parents two or three times per month to discuss the progress and the remaining issues. The special play therapist works with them once a week on playing with other children and relaxation techniques. There are Child and Family Team meetings at least one time per month, more frequently if needed.

Today, the Jones boys are doing well. YSN is no longer getting daily phone calls from the day care about their behaviors. Foster parents report that everything is better at home. The boys are ready to give hugs to each of the SOC staff at every visit. The placement is stabilized.

Northern Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 3 - *Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality* (One 3-hour session = 3 training hours)

Module 4 - *Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2392

Module

AURORA - Comfort Suites City Center
June 17 (Tues) & 6:30-9:30 p.m. 8
June 21 (Sat) 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Other In-Service Trainings

Transcultural Parenting

WAUKEGAN - Ramada Inn Waukegan
June 3 (Tues) & 6:30-9:30 p.m.
June 7 (Sat) 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Rock Valley Area 815-874-3000

For the summer training schedule, please contact the number listed above.

Pre-registration is required for all classes!
Call the number listed for your area.

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

College of DuPage Area 630-942-2392

CRYSTAL LAKE Country Inn & Suites
June 7 (Sat) 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
GLEN ELLYN College of DuPage
June 7 (Sat) 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
JOLIET/ROMEOVILLE Country Inn
June 28 (Sat)
KANKAKEE/BOURBONNAIS Lees Inn
June 24 & 26 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Rock Valley Area 815-874-3000

ROCKFORD The Bell Building
June 7 & 14 (Sat) 1:00-4:00 p.m.
IETC
June 19 & 26 (Thurs) 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Outdoor safety tips

Children especially enjoy playing outside with their favorite toys. Some of the favorite toys by age group are listed below with tips on how to keep the activities fun and safe.

Ages 1 and 2

Push and pull toys
Soft balls
Sandboxes
Baby pools

For safety:

Never leave your child alone in the pool or sandbox. Make sure none of the toys have small pieces they could choke on. Keep the child in a shaded area wearing sun screen.

Ages 3-5

Tricycles
Bikes with training wheels
Ride on toys

Make sure your child is well supervised. Set limits as to where they can ride their bikes. Helmets, knee and elbow pads, and wrist guards should be worn.

Ages 6-7

Roller skates
In-line skates
Bikes with training wheels

Remind your child that they are not allowed in the street.

Ages 8-11

Skateboards
Non-motorized scooters

Remind the child to wear light colored reflective clothing. Helmets and knee and elbow pads should be worn. A helmet should be worn flat atop the head.